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ABSTRACT

This report presents 10 suggestions for what the U.S. Department of Education can do to help schools raise achievement for all students and close the achievement gap by increasing teacher quality: (1) make improving teacher quality job one; (2) insist on good data; (3) ensure that states make an immediate priority of fixing the indefensible distribution of under-qualified teachers to disadvantaged students; (4) help separate fact from fiction and dispel the myth that getting better teachers is an unattainable goal; (5) relieve some of the pressure on K-12 by putting greater pressure on higher education to increase its production of teachers in the areas of greatest need; (6) send clear, unequivocal signals that "highly qualified" means just that; (7) make clear that No Child Left Behind provides flexibility for schools, particularly those in small, rural communities, to hire and retain highly qualified teachers; (8) support parents' right to know; (9) embrace state efforts to develop real measures of teacher effectiveness; and (10) push for significant improvements to the Higher Education Act. (SM)

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In Need of Improvement:

Ten Ways the U.S. Department of Education Has Failed to Live Up to Its Teacher Quality Commitments

The Education Trust

August 2003

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT:
Ten Ways the U.S. Department of Education Has Failed to Live Up to Its Teacher Quality Commitments

Misplaced Priorities?

The education world is currently focused on the testing and accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. This is understandable, as this basic information is the foundation of future school reform. But once we know which schools need improvement, we then have to get down to the hard business of actually improving them. Fortunately, NCLB also contains new provisions designed to do just that, by focusing on the single most important factor in student learning—teachers. These provisions are hugely important; they recognize that teachers are the most important educational resource and emphasize their vital role in school improvement. Through new programs, requirements, and funding, NCLB makes an essential promise—all students will have a highly-qualified teacher.

The U.S. Department of Education will play a central role in making this promise a reality. We have no doubt about Secretary of Education Rod Paige's commitment to improving the achievement of American youngsters and to closing the achievement gap that has for too long separated poor and minority students from other young Americans. We also know that he understands how important quality teaching is to the attainment of both goals.

Yet for the past two years, Paige's team at the Department has acted as if it believed that better accountability, alone, will bring about better achievement. The teacher quality provisions of NCLB have been at various times ignored, misinterpreted, and misunderstood. There is too little focus on these important issues and widespread confusion about what they mean. As a result, NCLB is seen by many as an attempt to arbitrarily punish experienced teachers, instead of what it actually is—a law that embraces the central importance of those teachers in helping students learn.

States and districts have gotten reams of federal guidance interpreting the accountability provisions of NCLB. Before granting its approval, Department officials examined state plans microscopically to ensure that they comport with the requirements of the law. But the teacher quality provisions of the law are another matter entirely. Questions from the field, if answered at all, are often answered with confusing and/or conflicting "advice." Indeed, the editor of a magazine for faculty in Black colleges was told rather pointedly by federal officials that there is no requirement in the law that states and districts discontinue the practice of assigning poor and minority students disproportionate numbers of uncertified, out of field, or inexperienced teachers—when, in fact, the law does contain a provision that requires exactly that.

Instead of asking to see state plans to improve teacher quality, the Department has left states and districts on their own. In effect, states have been placed on the "honor system" on these important requirements. Consequently, many states are ignoring their most basic obligations under the law. A recent GAO report documented that a majority of states still have not put into place the data systems that are needed to find out how many highly qualified teachers they have and where they're teaching.[1] This is essentially a conspiracy of silence about teacher quality in which the U.S. Department of Education is complicit.

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By dragging its heels, the Department has added immeasurably to the already enormous confusion in the field about what the law requires. Rural school districts and the politicians who represent them are up in arms. Community-based organizations are now cynical about the Administration's commitment to their children. And all around the country, state boards of education are wrestling with the tough issue of how to measure the content knowledge of veteran teachers with absolutely no guidance from the Department.

It's not too late, though. If the Department acts quickly, it can turn around the widespread perception that this Administration cares nothing about teacher quality. Indeed, by combining the authority it has under Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) with what it gained under the teacher quality provisions of NCLB, the Department can become a real partner with the states, school districts, and institutions of higher education that are struggling responsibly with their obligation to make sure that American students get the teachers they need to succeed.

Why Focus on Teacher Quality?

The importance of good teaching is better understood now than ever before. The latest research findings confirm what parents and educators have known all along: teacher quality is the single most important factor in determining the success of children in school, more than race, poverty, or any other outside influence.[2] Children who consistently have access to good teachers are soaring; those who don't are falling far behind. When it comes to closing the achievement gap for poor and minority students, good teaching matters most.

But despite all that is known about the impact of teachers, most policymakers and education leaders have failed to find bold and creative ways of raising the quality of teaching in low-performing schools. Low-income students and students of color continue to be taught disproportionately by the least experienced, least well-educated teachers and by teachers who fail to meet their state's licensure and certification standards. Simply put, we take the students who rely on public schools the most and we consistently give them the least.[3]

Powerful New Tools

Fortunately, the Department has a number of powerful tools at its disposal to address this problem. In 1998, Congress passed a new version of the Higher Education Act. For the first time, HEA required states to take a hard look at the role their colleges and universities play as the primary producer of new teachers.[4] Using measures like the success of new teaching candidates in passing teacher licensing tests, states must evaluate each higher education institution based on the quality of its teaching graduates and hold those institutions accountable for the results. Since 1998 almost $500 million has been provided under HEA to states, schools, and universities to increase the quality of teachers and teacher education.

Congress extended the federal commitment to teacher quality with the passage of NCLB. By the end of the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers must be "highly qualified," which means they will need to (1) have a 4-year college degree; (2) have a full state teaching license; and (3) show that they know the subject they're teaching, either by majoring in that subject in college or by passing a rigorous subject matter test or other state-mandated evaluation.

NCLB requires schools to send written notice to parents whose children are taught for four consecutive weeks by teachers who are not highly qualified. It also requires states to measure the disproportionate assignment of inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers to low-income and minority students, and to develop plans to fix that problem. Title II of NCLB provides states and districts with almost $3 billion in 2003 to improve teacher quality, the second-largest program in NCLB after the Title I program.

So we find ourselves at a high water mark, both in the critical need to increase teacher quality, and in the resources and authority available to the federal government to do so. Between HEA and NCLB, significant legal authority and financial resources are in place. The issue is using that authority wisely and spending those resources well.

What should the Department do? Here are ten common-sense answers to that question, ten things the U.S. Department of Education can do to help schools raise achievement for all students and close the achievement gap by increasing the quality of teachers.

1) Make improving teacher quality job one.

There's a lot going on in public education, and the Department inevitably has to make decisions about what's most important. These decisions have a ripple effect across the country; they send signals indicating the areas that demand the most attention. Now that every state has developed and implemented an accountability plan under NCLB, the Department should turn its attentions to improving teacher quality, making it the first priority of national school improvement.

Secretary Paige should start by appointing a high-profile leader on this issue, a kind of "Teacher Quality Czar" to coordinate the Department's efforts and serve as a source of information for policymakers, education leaders, and journalists. This office could ensure that all federal efforts aimed at raising teacher quality are coordinated and consistent, advancing an overall vision for teacher quality and providing clear guidance on how NCLB and HEA can work together to help states meet those goals.

The Department recently announced the creation of a "Teacher Assistance Corps" designed to give states technical assistance on meeting the teacher requirements of NCLB. But state participation with the Corps will be purely voluntary. The central importance of teacher quality needs to be elevated much higher and the vital teacher quality provisions of NCLB need to be much more aggressively enforced.

2) Insist on good data.

Both HEA and NCLB create systems driven by information—data about schools, universities, students, and teachers. NCLB is peppered with references to "scientifically-based" information, reflecting the important principle that education improvement needs to be driven by evidence, focused on objective, verifiable measures of success. For these reasons, the integrity and accuracy of that information is absolutely crucial. Without good data, the whole system falls apart. The Department serves a critical role in this process, collecting important data from states and schools, setting standards for data quality, and analyzing the data in a way that promotes student learning.

When it comes to data on teacher quality, the Department is consistently falling short in this mission. For example, when the Department asks states for data, it has an obligation to make sure that the information is accurate. The Department recently provided an HEA-mandated report to Congress on the state of teacher quality in America.[5] Given the importance of the issue, one would assume that the Department would have an interest in making sure that the data in question meets some minimum standards of reliability and usefulness. Unfortunately, this appears not to be the case.

For example, comparing the data in this year's report to data from the previous year's version of the same report, we find that the total number of teachers at work in Utah dropped by over one-third, with almost 11,800 teachers disappearing from the state. Where they went is unclear, although they may have all moved to Alabama, which reported an *increase* of 11,444 teachers, a jump of 24%. No reason for these dramatic changes is provided, because the likely explanation is that states are simply providing inconsistent and unreliable data to the Department, which then proceeds to dutifully tabulate it and send it to Congress.

Even when the Department actually collects the information it needs and ensures the quality of the data, it still has an obligation to analyze and present it accurately. It falls short of this mark as well in the recent teacher quality report. The National Center for Education Statistics conducts a periodic survey of teachers called the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The information from this survey is accurate, reliable, and important. But the data still needs to be interpreted correctly, and in this case it hasn't been. In the report, the Department used SASS data to estimate the number of teachers nationwide meeting the NCLB "highly qualified" standard. Here's what one subsequent newspaper article—alarmingly titled "Federal Education Report Finds Shortage of Highly Qualified Teachers"—recounted in quoting from the report:

> **" *'Only 54 percent of our nation's secondary teachers were highly qualified during the 1999-2000 school year,'* the latest year for complete data from all the states. *'These data suggest that out-of-field teaching is a serious problem across the country.'***
> **The report says the term 'highly qualified' means having at least a bachelor's degree, state teacher certification and a major in all fields taught."[6]**

But buried in a footnote to the data, the report explains that the "54 percent" amount is based on a definition that is *not the same* as the actual "highly qualified" definition, because it doesn't include teachers that demonstrated subject matter knowledge by means other than having a major in all fields taught, by passing a subject matter test or other state-created assessment. Since we know that many thousands of teachers who did not major in the subject(s) they teach passed a subject matter test or otherwise have demonstrated subject matter knowledge, the report significantly overestimates the extent of a problem that is already creating much confusion and anxiety for educators and the public.

Good data is the bedrock on which the entire system of accountability and improvement envisioned in NCLB and HEA is built. The Department needs to do a better job of collecting important teacher quality data, ensuring its reliability, and analyzing it in an accurate way.

3) Ensure that states make an immediate priority of fixing the indefensible distribution of underqualified teachers to disadvantaged students.

We can't meet the NCLB goal of bringing all children to proficiency without closing the achievement gap among low-income and minority students, and we can't close the achievement gap without stopping the indefensible practice of consistently assigning those students to the least effective, least well-prepared teachers. This is the irreducible minimum of school improvement, the one thing no state can afford not to do.

NCLB is unambiguous on this—it requires states to measure the extent of the maldistribution, and take steps to fix it. Unfortunately, the Department has so far displayed remarkably little interest in this most important issue. States have received no guidance whatsoever from the Department on how to comply with these provisions. Nor does the Department seem to really care.

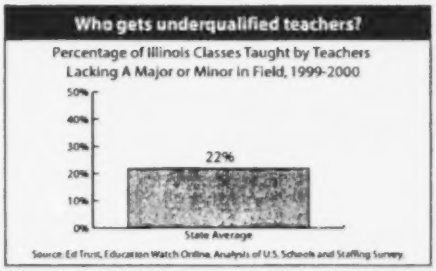
States must report on teacher distribution.

On their NCLB-required state report cards, each state must report on the distribution of highly qualified

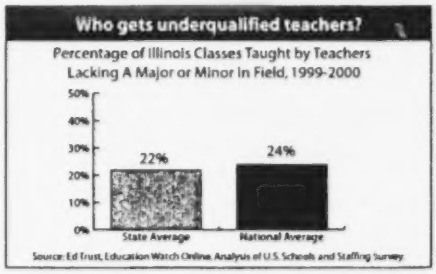
Digging Deeper on Teacher Quality

■ **Getting Beneath Averages**

Looking at statewide averages often masks large disparities between different schools. As the example below illustrates, the statewide average looks very different than the situation in high-minority and high-poverty schools.



■ **The comparison we usually make:**



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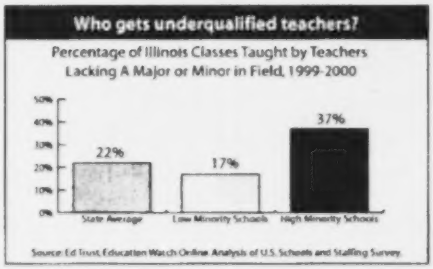
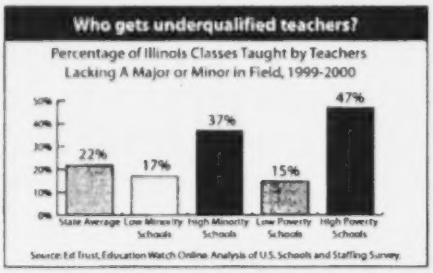
■ Slice the data by *race*:

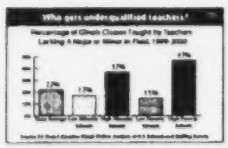

Who gets underqualified teachers?
Percentage of Illinois Classes Taught by Teachers Lacking A Major or Minor in Field, 1999-2000
22%
17%
37%
State Average
Low Minority Schools
High Minority Schools
Source: Ed Trust, Education Watch Online Analysis of U.S. Schools and Staffing Survey

■ Slice the data by *race and poverty*:



Digging Deeper on Teacher Quality

- In Illinois, one-fifth of core academic classes are taught by an out-of-field teacher.
- Classes are more than twice as likely to be taught by an out-of-field teacher in high-minority schools as they are in low-minority schools.
- Classes are more than three times as likely to be to be taught by an out-of-field teacher in high-poverty schools as they are in low-poverty schools.



teachers.[7] In addition to reporting the percent of classes throughout the state not taught by highly qualified teachers, states must compare the percent of classes without highly qualified teachers in their highest- and lowest-poverty schools. Because states have been allowed to be derelict in their responsibility to document how they deploy their teachers, much of this data will be all but worthless.

A first look at state reporting on the distribution of highly qualified teachers under NCLB will come on September 1, 2003. By that date, each state must submit a document to the Department showing the percent of classrooms across the state without a highly-qualified teacher. Inexplicably, instead of asking states to compare the percent of highly qualified teachers in high-poverty schools to the supply in low-poverty schools (as required on the state report card), the Department has asked States to compare high-poverty schools to the *overall* state average. The downside of this approach is that it will mask the true extent of the disparity, since low-poverty schools tend to have the highest percentage of qualified teachers (see sidebar). The upside of this approach is unknown.

And ensure that poor and minority students get their fair share of qualified and experienced teachers.

In addition to measuring and reporting on the maldistribution of teachers, NCLB includes a requirement that states take action to fix the problem. Each state plan is required to include the "steps that the State [Department of Education] will take to ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers." Crucially, this provision addresses the inequitable distribution of such teachers not only to low-income students, but to minority students, too. In addition, states must act on the disproportionate assignment of the least experienced teachers to low-income students and students of color.

But the federal government has done nothing to guarantee that states are developing and implementing these plans. They've asked states to submit rudimentary schedules of improvement over the next two years, with the goal of having zero classes without a qualified teacher by the end of the 2005—2006 school year. And

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that's it. No details will be provided about how this difficult problem will be fixed; no information will be forthcoming about steps that will be taken or reforms that will be implemented. Just vague promises, and then deafening silence.

Minority and low-income parents would no doubt be eager to learn what states are doing to help their children get their fair share of quality teachers and what kind of progress is being made. Unfortunately, the Department has never asked states to submit a description of the steps they must take or make those measures public in any way. Thus, these "plans," if they exist at all, have been left on the shelf in State Departments of Education, unseen, unheard of, and very likely unimplemented.

The Department needs to initiate an immediate 180-degree shift of emphasis on the unfair assignment of unqualified teachers to poor and minority students. It's not just *an* important issue; it's the *most* important issue. Whether or not this problem is taken seriously in the coming years will have a huge impact on whether the entire enterprise of NCLB will be a success or failure. Every state should be required to publicly submit a detailed, legitimate plan for giving low-income and minority students their fair share of highly qualified teachers. Those plans that contain only vague goals and platitudes—there will be many—should be rejected. Distribution of funding should be made contingent on states meeting these commitments under the law.

4) Help separate fact from fiction...and dispel the myth that getting better teachers is an unattainable goal.

Unable or unwilling to fight against the idea of better teachers in theory, naysayers will often argue against it in practice, saying that the goal of having all teachers highly qualified is "a nice idea" but "unrealistic" because the profession already suffers from a shortfall of qualified candidates, a problem that will supposedly grow exponentially if we raise standards for teacher quality. They'll also say that asking for better teachers will drive disproportionate numbers of minorities out of the field, suggesting that people of color are somehow unable to meet higher standards.

These objections don't hold water, and the Department should say so loud and clear. It's true that there are specific teacher shortfalls in some hard-to-fill subject areas and in a number of high-poverty urban and rural schools, but there are also *surpluses* of teachers in other areas and geographic regions. While some suggest that there is massive attrition of new teachers from the profession, a study by the National Center for Education Statistics suggests otherwise, finding that among recent college graduates, "those who taught at the K-12 level were among the most stable of all employed graduates with respect to their occupations 3 years later."[8]

Schools often bemoan the difficulty of hiring good candidates, and for many schools that serve large numbers of low-income students and are hampered by inequitable funding schemes, this is substantially true. But that doesn't mean nothing can be done. For example, the New Teacher Project has recently shown great success in helping districts like New York City and Baton Rouge recruit qualified mid-career professionals with education and experience in math, science, and other high need areas to teach in the most needy schools.[9]

The Department should meticulously research and publish information about the production and retention of high quality teachers—who they are, where they're needed, and how schools can find them. The Department should also support and draw attention to strategies that are successful in attracting, honoring, and retaining high-quality teachers in the hardest-to-staff schools.

5) Relieve some of the pressure on K-12 by putting greater pressure on higher education to increase its production of teachers in the areas of greatest need.

To help with geographic or subject-specific teacher shortages, states should be encouraged by the Department to expand the accountability systems they put into place under Title II of HEA to measure how well colleges and universities are addressing the supply of new teachers. Each college and university should have explicit goals for producing increased numbers of high-quality new teachers in the subject areas that are most needed, including goals for recruiting and graduating minority teaching candidates.

Few states can say this can't be done, since few states have really tried to do it. And those that have tried

have made real progress. For example, the Texas A&M University System responded to state goals for dramatic improvement in producing teachers by meeting them, then setting its own higher goals. The total number of new teaching candidates it produced that passed the state certification test increased by 20% from 2000 to 2002, while the number of African-American teacher candidates increased by 116% and the number of bilingual/ESL candidates jumped by 84%.[10] The number of new teacher candidates also increased by 64% in special education, 41% in math, and 34% in science. And despite an increase of hundreds of new teaching candidates, the pass rate on the state licensure exam did not decline. This shows that it's possible to raise the quantity of teachers, enhance diversity, and maintain standards of teacher quality.

6) Send clear, unequivocal signals that "highly qualified" means just that.

States have a fair amount of flexibility to implement the "highly qualified teacher" provisions of NCLB as they see fit. The Department needs to make sure that this flexibility isn't abused, that states adhere to both the letter and the spirit of the law. For example, teachers need *full* state certification to be "highly qualified." NCLB specifically excludes teachers who have "had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis."

That said, the law does acknowledge that many states have developed alternatives to traditional routes to teacher certification, some of which have been quite successful in bringing talented, motivated individuals into the classroom. But in its zeal to support alternative routes into teaching, the Department has allowed some alternative-route teachers to be considered highly qualified without any pre-service training whatsoever. This takes the idea of "streamlining" teacher training past its logical limit; it is patently inconsistent with the law and it undermines the goal of ensuring that only fully-certified teachers are considered highly qualified. The Department should add a pre-service training requirement of at least 6 weeks for all alternate route teachers.

NCLB also says that highly qualified teachers have to know the subject they're teaching. Most teachers satisfy this requirement before they even enter the classroom, either through their college major or by passing a subject-specific teacher licensing test. But some don't, and research shows that a disturbing number of teachers nationwide are in the classroom with no formal training in the field they teach.[11] These teachers have a number of options to demonstrate their knowledge:

a) *They can take a state subject matter test.* This is the simplest and most straightforward option. It's important to note that nothing in the law instructs or encourages states to fire or otherwise punish any teacher that fails the test. States should offer these teachers coursework or professional development opportunities to deepen their knowledge of the subject they teach and help them pass the test. Dollars are provided in the law to help this happen.

b) *States can provide teachers with enough additional coursework and professional development to give them the equivalent of a college major or an advanced credential.* This needs to be a legitimate standard. California, for example, originally tried to set this bar significantly below the number of credits actually required to earn a college major. The Department should provide guidance, and remind states that they have significant dollars to provide teachers with this additional education.

c) *States can develop an alternative assessment of teacher knowledge, something other than a test.* This is known as the HOUSSE provision, because it calls for a "high objective uniform state standard of evaluation." Unlike subject matter tests or college majors, these processes don't currently exist –states get to make them up. Without careful guidance and monitoring from the Department, this is likely to become a huge loophole in the process of ensuring that every child has a highly qualified teacher. Accordingly, we recommend that the Department immediately convene a working task force of thoughtful leaders who can both generate some suggestions on how states might go about this and recommend some principles to govern the Department's review of state plans.

7) Make clear that NCLB provides flexibility for schools, particularly those in small, rural communities, to hire and retain highly qualified teachers.

The challenge in implementing NCLB is creating a system that treats all students equally in insisting on a quality education and high standards of success, but at the same time accommodates the unique circumstances of different schools across the country, as well as different academic disciplines. For example, in many schools science teachers must teach a variety of sciences. Does this mean that Mr. Smith, who teaches chemistry, physics, and biology in a small rural high school, should have to go back to college and get three new bachelor's degrees?

No, of course not. That's just unreasonable, and it's not what the law requires. The Department needs to be clear that teachers meet the "highly qualified" requirements as long as they have a major in the general subject area they teach. So if Mr. Smith has a science major, under NCLB he can be considered highly qualified to teach all three science classes.

That said, many teachers are often assigned to teach subjects even beyond the general disciplinary family of their college major. Of course, these teachers have the option to take a subject matter test in the other areas they're teaching. Knowledgeable teachers should have no problem with this—it's hard to argue that anyone is highly qualified to teach a subject on which they themselves can't pass a test. However, given the prevalence of out-of-field teaching in small rural schools and the difficulty of arranging on-site professional learning opportunities, the Department should enourage the higher education community to provide distance learning opportunities for teachers in more remote areas. Grants under Title II of the Higher Education Act provide funding for precisely this kind of assistance.

The Department hasn't provided enough clarity on these issues, leading to needless worry in communities that already have many challenges in complying with the law.

8) Support parents' right to know.

Many parents are starved for good information about their children's schools. NCLB helps them by requiring that schools notify parents in writing if their children are taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not highly qualified. A number of states have lagged behind in putting in place data systems that can track this kind of information. In addition, a significant number of schools appear to be simply ignoring the law, withholding information from parents in deference to some teachers' dissatisfaction with the new requirements. The Alabama State Board of Education, for example, recently passed a resolution to ignore the notification provisions for the upcoming year.

This is startlingly bad behavior, denying the right of parents to know vital public information about their children's education, simply because schools are unwilling to tell parents if their children are being taught by a teacher who meets the standards for "highly qualified." The Department needs to insist that parents' right to know be upheld in all cases, and send a clear message to administrators and officials that no exceptions will be tolerated.

9) Embrace state efforts to develop real measures of teacher effectiveness.

Teacher quality is important for one reason and one reason only—better teachers mean more successful students. But we know remarkably little about teacher effectiveness in helping students learn—most schools and parents have no objective, quantifiable data about which teachers are actually effective and which are not. As a result, we're forced to substitute measures of teacher *qualities* for measures of teacher *quality*—instead of measuring which teachers are most successful with their students, we use proxy measures like experience, education, licensure scores, etc. In the long run, to ensure that every student has an *effective* teacher, we need to move from insisting on high qualifications to insisting on high quality.

Fortunately, some states and districts are leading the way. For the past ten years, Tennessee has used a system that measures teacher effectiveness by calculating the amount students learn from the beginning of the year to the end—the "value-added" that teachers provide. By

using statistical controls for students' learning history, the system isolates each teacher's individual contribution to student learning. This information is being used with great success in Tennessee to help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses with different students and in different subject areas. A similar system is used in Dallas, TX, while school districts in Arizona, North Carolina, Minnesota, and other states have also recently begun using value-added teacher data. Teacher effectiveness data is useful in a wide range of areas—the Carnegie Corporation's "Teachers for a New Era" initiative links improving university schools of education to evaluating the value-added progress of new teachers' students.

Value-added teacher effectiveness data is the future of understanding and improving teacher quality. The Department should build on the success and best practices of these early adopters to spearhead a national effort to make value-added measures of teacher effectiveness standard information in America's schools. The Department's Institute of Education Sciences should support this work by convening national experts on the best design and application of value-added data systems. In the coming months, the Education Trust will be publishing a new report on how states and schools can use value-added data to close the achievement gap.

10) Push for significant improvements to the Higher Education Act

HEA is now back up in front of Congress for reauthorization. It's time to build on the successes of the previous version and look for opportunities to improve. We can start by increasing the effectiveness of federal grants to states and universities designed to improve teacher training and teacher quality. While these grants are important and should continue, a recent GAO report found that the Department has little idea if the money is being well spent, because it has no system of evaluating whether or not the grants actually made any teachers more effective in helping students learn.[12] The House of Representatives recently passed new HEA language that requires states asking for grants to measure teacher effectiveness in improving student performance, using measures similar to the value-added systems already in place in some areas. The Department should actively support this addition to the Act.

HEA also requires states to report annually on the quality of university teacher education programs. Many state responses to these requirements, as well as those mentioned previously relating to the distribution of uncertified teachers, have reflected sloppiness and willful bad faith in about equal measure.[13] Some states reported data that is inaccurate, incomplete, and generally useless. Others simply allowed their colleges and universities to openly game the accountability system, manipulating reporting requirements to pretend that every single education school graduate in the state is successful. The Department's attention to the alignment of standards for teachers and standards for students has also been lax. The Education Trust will be issuing an upcoming report with more detailed information on these issues.

The Department should focus the public's attention on these shortcomings in the implementation of HEA and should propose meaningful reforms in the new legislation.

Conclusion

The Department's recent intense focus on making sure that every state complies with the accountability provisions of NCLB stands in marked, positive contrast to past efforts. It shows that the Department is quite capable of insisting that states do what the law requires, that it can be a major force in driving forward the cause of immediate, substantial improvement in America's public schools.

Now the time has come to apply that same commitment and intensity of effort to getting all children the high-quality teachers they need. The Department's record up to this point isn't promising, but it's not too late to change course. Only now are all schools really beginning to realize that there can be no more delay in working to close the achievement gap, that they have no choice but to take strong action to give all students the quality of instruction they need and deserve.

The Department can seize this opportunity to lead the way. If it does so, if it works tirelessly to make the promise of highly-qualified teachers a reality for all low-income and minority students, if it is relentlessly focused on using every legal tool at its disposal to get those children the instruction they desperately need, it will fulfill its central mission of meeting the goals of No Child Left Behind and elevating America's teachers to the prominence and recognition they deserve.

ENDNOTES

[1] *No Child Left Behind Act: More Information Would Help States Determine Which Teachers Are Highly Qualified,* U.S. General Accounting Office, July 2003.

[2] *Good Teaching Matters,* The Education Trust, 1998.

[3] *Honor in the Boxcar,* The Education Trust, 2000.

[4] Approximately 7 out of 10 new teachers receive their post-secondary education from public colleges and universities, see *1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study,* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

[5] *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Second Annual Report on Teacher Quality,* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy Planning and Innovation, June 2003.

[6] *The Washington Times,* July 16, 2003.

[7] There is no deadline for publishing state report cards under NCLB; they will be released throughout the 2003-2004 school year (with 2002-2003 school year data).

[8] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Attrition of New Teachers Among Recent College Graduates: Comparing Occupational Stability Among 1992-93 Graduates Who Taught and Those Who Worked in Other Occupations, 2001.*

[9] The New Teacher Project, www.tntp.org.

[10] Texas A&M University System, December 2002.

[11] *All Talk, No Action: Putting an End to Out-of-Field Teaching,* The Education Trust, 2002.

[12] *Higher Education: Activities Underway to Improve Teacher Training, but Reporting on the Activities Could be Enhanced,* U.S. General Accounting Office, December 2002.

[13] *Interpret With Caution: The First State Title II Reports on the Quality of Teacher Preparation,* The Education Trust, 2002.

About The Education Trust

The Education Trust, Inc. was created to promote high academic achievement for all students, at all levels—kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on the schools and colleges most often left behind in education improvement effort: those serving Latinos, African American and low-income students.

The Education Trust works side-by-side with policy makers, parents, education professionals, community and business leaders—in cities and towns across the country—who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We also share lessons learned in these schools, colleges and communities with policy makers.

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